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# HR'S SUPPORT FOR THE LEADERS

– Case study IKEA Raisio



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Successful leadership is essential for organization's prosperity. To lead effectively in a large organization, HR's role as a support function is crucial for the leaders. HR pursues to offer expertise and guidance regarding the personnel related topics, yet, it is important to remember that the leaders need to take responsibility over their own teams.

This thesis pursues to research if, at the time, IKEA Raisio's HR department was successful at supporting the leaders regarding their position. Support, in this context, stands for sharing knowledge and guidance, offering assistance and providing sources of information. In addition, one of the objectives is to examine if the personnel related task division between the leaders and HR in IKEA Raisio is clear for the parties.

The research was conducted with a mixed method study, quantitative research focused on the leaders and qualitative method researched the HR's view point. Based on the results of these studies, the researcher was able to draw analysis of the situation and hence give her recommendations for improvements.

The findings, analysis and the suggestions for IKEA are concealed in this thesis, along with some other parts of the body, and thus not part of the published version.

### KEYWORDS:

Human resource, leadership, leader, manager, support, task division

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# HENKILÖSTÖHALLINNON TUKI ESIMIEHILLE

- Tapaustutkimus IKEA Raisio

Organisaatio tarvitsee hyvää johtamista menestyäkseen. Tehokas johtaminen suuressa organisaatiossa kaipaa HR funktion tukea. HR:n roolina on tarjota asiantuntemusta ja ohjeistaa henkilöstöön liittyvissä asioissa, mutta on tärkeää muistaa, että esimiehen tulee kantaa vastuu omasta tiimistään.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on tutkia, jos IKEA Raision HR funktio pystyi onnistuneesti tarjoamaan esimiehille heidän kaipaamaansa tukea esimiehen roolissa. Tässä asiayhteydessä tuki tarkoittaa tietotaidon jakamista, avun tarjoamista sekä erilaisten tietolähteiden saattamista esimiesten käytettäväksi. Lisäksi, tavoitteena oli tutkia, koetaanko IKEA Raisiossa henkilöstöön liittyvien tehtävien jako selkeäksi HR:n sekä esimiesten välillä.

Tutkimuksessa on yhdistetty laadullista sekä määrällistä tutkimusmenetelmää. Laadullinen eli kvalitatiivinen menetelmä kohdistui henkilöstöhallintoon, ja määrällinen eli kvantitatiivinen menetelmä esimiehiin. Tutkimustulosten perusteella tutkija teki analyysin tilanteesta ja siten antoi ehdotuksensa tilanteen kehittämiseksi.

Tutkimuksen löydökset, analyysi ja suositukset, sekä tietyt kohdat aiemmista kappaleista ovat salattuja, ja täten poistettu julkaistavasta opinnäytetyön versiosta.

ASIASANAT:

Henkilöstöhallinto, johtajuus, esimies, johtaja, tuki, tehtäväjako

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Explanation of abbreviation</u>
COM-IN	Communication and Interior Design
HR	Human resource
HRM	Human resource management
ID	Interior designer
KPI	Key performance indicator
TES	Collective labor agreement (Työehtosopimus)
SFM	Swedish food market
SSS	Sales, supply and support
VM	Visual merchandiser

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

This thesis was commissioned by IKEA Raisio store and it focuses on researching the current level of support the human resource department in IKEA Raisio store was at the time providing for the managers regarding their leadership position. As in today's fast paced business world the pressure is high for the managers, and they need to be able to balance managing the operations with leading their teams. Operational management in this respect signifies concern for the results and optimizing the sales, whereas leading the people implies more to motivation, wellbeing at work and overall pursuing to reach the sales goals through concern for the workers.

Leadership is important in an organization in order to get the team to follow and direct them towards the aims and objectives. The leaders need to take responsibility and initiate actions as effective management is essential for any organization. (Mullins, 2013 pp. 369-421) With the help of good people skills, the leaders are able to motivate and develop their team with a positive and constructive feedback. Satisfied, skilled and motivated workers are the key elements to successful business operations, and the leaders with the support of human resource team have a significant role in this setting (Österberg, 2014, pp.127).

## 1.2 The objectives for the thesis

The objective of this thesis was to examine whether the human resource department provided relevant guidance and support for the leaders in IKEA Raisio store. The author also mapped the needs of the leaders and pursued to provide a clear synopsis of the situation at the time and possible deficiencies. The thesis aimed at identifying if the leaders had needs that were not met by the human resource department.

The thesis will provide answers to the following questions

1. In what areas of their work do the leaders seek support from the human resource department?

2. Are the leaders currently receiving enough support from the HR department regarding their leadership role?
3. Are there areas in which the leaders would need more support than currently provided?
4. Is the task division between human resource department and the leaders clear to the parties concerned?

### 1.3 Motivation

The motivation for this thesis was derived from the author's personal interests and future professional goals regarding leadership work and human resource field. As this topic was discussed with IKEA Raisio's HR manager, the author recognized it as a great opportunity to combine the two. The eagerness to advance her own skills and understanding on the topic and developing herself to be potentially a better leader in the future was motivating the researcher to study this topic. *Concealed*

The research is important as it brings to the awareness the current level of support provided by the human resource department and also whether the leaders consider it adequate. This information enabled the researcher to draw conclusions and to make suggestions for IKEA Raisio to execute further enhancing actions. Also, one of the objectives were to find out if the task division was clear for the parties, i.e. in what leadership tasks should HR be included and when is it unnecessary. This information could enable IKEA Raisio to make some changes according to the findings, if required. With such changes IKEA Raisio would be able to make their operations even more efficient, improve the cooperation between the leaders and HR, and further improve the leadership work and IKEA leaders' satisfaction at work.

### 1.4 Company introduction

IKEA is a multinational furniture retailer which was founded by 17-year-old Ingvar Kamprad in 1943. The success behind the company has been said to be Ingvar Kamprad's revolutionary innovation to showcase the products in IKEA stores, so that the customers are able to try them out before buying, and selling the items in flat packs, which will enable the customers to take their purchases home right away, and it also lowers e.g. the delivery and storing costs, and hence support the IKEA's environmental



values. (Swedish Institute 2017) With this business model, IKEA has expanded around the world and became the world's largest furniture retailer, currently run by Kamprad's sons with the rest of the board. IKEA has 403 stores in 49 countries, of which majority is owned by the IKEA Group and the rest, about 50 stores are franchisees. These stores together employ even 194 000 coworkers, and carry a range of nearly 10 000 products, which converted in to 38,3 billion euros in sales in 2017. (IKEA.com 2017)

IKEA Raisio store was opened in 2008, as the third IKEA store in Finland. The local staff consists of workers from sales, human resources, logistics, restaurant, communication & interior design (Com-in), business navigation & operations and customer service functions, a total of about 240 people. All these functions have a manager and a different amount of levels of line-managers, such as shopkeepers and team leaders. This research will focus on all the leaders in IKEA Raisio store who have immediate subordinates, a team of 36 people, despite of their managerial level or function. Regarding this thesis, when stating IKEA, the author refers to the complete IKEA Group, and when talking about IKEA Raisio store, that will be valid only in that specific store.

The figure 1 below shows in different shades of gray the levels of all the positions in IKEA Raisio store which include a leadership role with immediate subordinates, and thus are included in this study. Positions in dark grey include the top management, i.e. the store manager and the management team. In this group, the HR Manager's position, designated in blue, is exceptional at the study and not parallel to the rest of the management team, due to possible bias role regarding the research. The HR Manager will not be included to the team of leaders, but she will be part of the research by representing the HR-team. Positions in medium grey, designates the middle management, and finally the positions in light grey, i.e. team leaders, are representing the first-line management level in IKEA Raisio store. In addition, HR partners, designated in yellow, are representing the human resource side of the research along with HR Manager, and therefore included in the study. Roles with a white background on the chart do not include immediate subordinates and thus are not part of this research.

### *Concealed*

Figure 1 Organizational Chart, IKEA Raisio 2018

### 1.5 Previous studies on the topic

#### *Concealed*

Also, regarding similar published studies elsewhere, outside of IKEA, the selection available seemed to be limited. Other researches which would address the support-relations between the leaders and human resource team were not found, but the researcher was able to utilize some theoretical information about leadership and HR work as a supplement for the research findings of this study.

### 1.6 Current situation

#### *Concealed*

### 1.7 The structure of the thesis

The introduction section gave some background information about the case and the company in question, also the objectives of the thesis were discussed. The thesis will continue with defining the leadership and HR roles, and giving some theoretical frameworks to the case.

Subsequently, the research methods are described, and the results of the mixed method study are opened and analyzed. As a part of the analysis, also some connections are made between the results and earlier addressed theory. Finally, the researcher will provide her conclusion to the case and give some practical suggestions to develop the current situation in IKEA Raisio regarding the HR's support towards the leadership work. The recommendations are given to improve cooperation between the parties, which again could lead to better job satisfaction and more efficient ways of working.

Also, the researcher would like to clarify that throughout this thesis the managers and leaders of IKEA Raisio are referred as leaders, since this study addresses leading the personnel rather than the task management side of the leaders' role. *Concealed*

## 2 THE ROLES

### 2.1 Human resource role

Human resource department partly acts as a support function for the others. HR specialists pursue to develop the leadership role and to provide professional support for the leaders. In a way, HR professionals act even as companions for the managers to create a successful leadership role. (Österberg, 2014, pp.128)

Human resource management (HRM) includes vast field of various of tasks, of which many are handled in cooperation between the leaders and the HR department (Dessler, 2017, pp. 39). To ensure efficient operations, HR should make sure that the task division is clear for the leaders, even though they are available to assist and offer specialized knowledge on personnel related topics. Leaders need to be able to lead their own teams, and hand-holding from HR's part can easily lead to inefficient ways of working. (Missildine 2015) This inefficiency can be prevented with a clear guideline to clarify the task division between the leaders and the HR department.

*Concealed*

### 2.2 Leadership role

Regardless of HR acting as a support function and providing assistance for the leadership role, the managers carry the ultimate responsibility over the personnel related topics and are expected to handle many employee cases with their own expertise. (Österberg, 2014, pp.14)

Along with representing the company and strategically managing the operations, the leaders need to recruit new people, recognize talent and skills in their teams, and further train and develop these workers. They also need to be able to assess the performance of their team members, reward and motivate when needed and use disciplinary actions if necessary. On top of that, the leaders need to handle sometimes even very complicated health related issues of their workers, such as work stress and burnouts. (Johtajuus, 2018) All these topics require specialized knowledge and experience, which sometimes leaders do not possess, especially for the more rare and complicated cases,

or with less experienced leaders. In such situations, the human resource department supports the leaders in their role with the expertise the HR has from the field. (Österberg, 2014, pp 14)

With this thesis, the researcher pursues to find out if the leaders in IKEA Raisio store are getting the support they need regarding their work with personnel related topics. Such topics are defined to be for example employment and occupational health issues, disciplinary actions and staff development. With support in this context we mean providing and sharing knowledge, encouragement or assistance in challenging situations, for example when giving a person a formal warning. In addition, the research will uncover if the task division between HR and the leaders is clear regardless of many seemingly overlapping tasks, such as recruiting, and thus leads towards more efficient cooperation between the parties.

### 2.3 Manager versus a leader

As part of the more modern management theories, the people aspects have been emphasized and differences between management and leadership have been widely accepted. Leadership is often associated with people and based on the diverse interaction between the leader and the subordinates. Whereas management relates to handling things, cases and tasks with a basis on rational decision making. (Vanhala, 2006, pp.257-258)

Yet, it is good to remember that leaders are not always placed within the hierarchical structure of the organization. Member of the team can operate as a leader without having an official manager position. Leadership is more about creating excitement at the workplace and having others to follow, they also usually have a more personal attitude towards the goals and more empathy with other people. (Mullins, 2013, pp. 369-370)

Kent has differentiated the leaders and managers with the following characteristics:

- Managers do the things right - leaders to the right things
- Manager role is based on an authority relationship – leadership role is an influence relationship
- Manager creates stability - leaders create change

Even though Kent's division is provocative, it still can provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics behind the two roles. (Kent, 2005, pp. 1010-1017)

It is still important to realise, that a manager needs to be able to act as a leader as well, to take care of the people in his or her team. In this thesis, when referring to IKEA, all the positions which include subordinates, are referred as leaders.

IKEA recruits leaders, as well as other employees, with a value-based method. It is considered important that everyone in IKEA is able to share and work in accordance with the IKEA values. Among the IKEA values, are for example, togetherness, caring for the people and planet and leading by example (Inter IKEA Systems B.V. 2018). In addition, IKEA's vision of "creating a better everyday life for the many people", pursues to provide wide range of well-designed and functional products, with prices so low that as many people as possible could be able to afford them (Inter IKEA Systems B.V. 2018). IKEA leaders need to be able to share these values and vision.

### 3 MANAGEMENT THEORIES

Management theories have developed tremendously over the decades. In the 1930's and 40's trait theories pursued to define the features which successful leaders should possess. In the 1950's and 60's researchers started to put more emphasis on the behaviour of the leaders, whereas at the 70's the situational factors were starting to gain importance. (Vanhala, 2006, pp. 259; Yukl, 2013, pp. 28)

The more contemporary theories, such as transformational leadership theories, have put more significance on the relationship between the leader and the team. Also, it got widely accepted that leaders are not always born, but that leadership can also be taught and learned. (Robbins, 2013, pp. 368-397) This way of thinking is also well in lined with IKEA's perspective to the leadership and the organizational values, as IKEA pursues to support the growth of their workers, for example by mainly choosing the leaders inside the company rather than hiring outside. The theories below will discuss in more detailed Managerial Grid -leadership theory which studies the relations of task management with people leadership. This theory will provide the researcher a framework to later on study the leaders of IKEA Raisio and how they are able to balance these factors. Furthermore, Management Skills -theory about linking the managerial levels with competences is discoursed, and again later on connected to the findings of the research.

#### 3.1 Managerial Grid

Managerial Grid is part of Blake and Mouton's leadership theory designed in the 60's, which bases on the belief that the leadership style is dependent on the manager's attitudes, opinions and mindset. Their theory also states that since individual viewpoints affect the leaders, education and conscious developing have an impact on leadership. (Viitala, 2003, pp. 80) The Managerial Grid -theory was one of the first theories regarding behavioral orientation to leadership. (Montgomery, 2012, pp. 59)

The managerial grid below in figure 2. demonstrates different dimensions of combining the concern for people and concern for tasks as a manager, which then creates various leadership styles. On the grid, the axis X designates the concern for tasks or production, i.e. the effort to achieve the best possible result, and axis Y the concern for people i.e. effort to satisfy the employees. (Gallo, 2016, pp. 246-252)

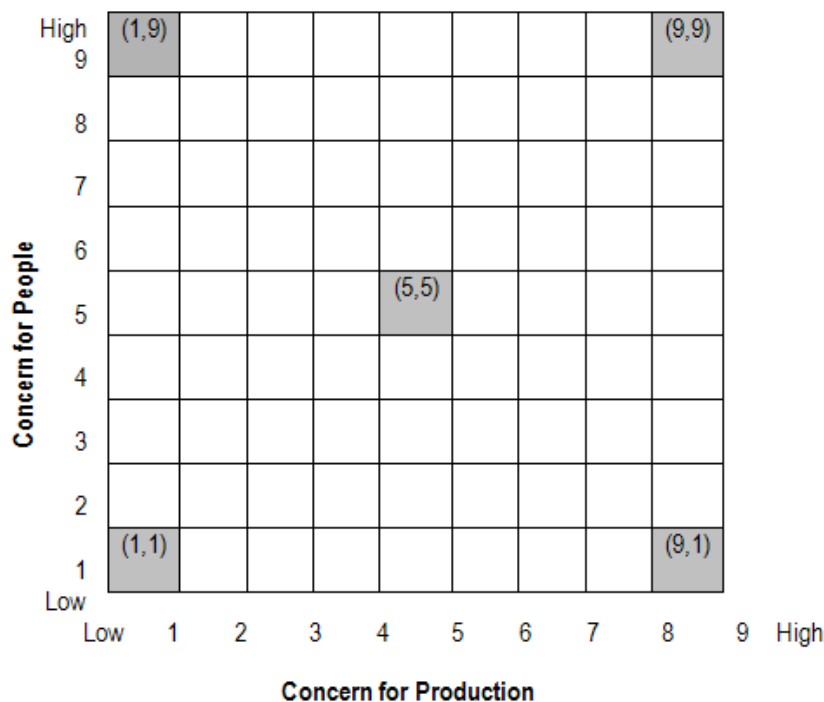


Figure 2 Managerial Grid by Blake and Mouton, 1978  
(Management Study Guide, n.d.)

1,9 on the table signifies the “Country Club” leaders, who neglect the responsibilities over the results and tasks, and instead invests a lot of time and concern for the people, i.e. his or her subordinates. Personal and social needs are met, as opposed to those necessary to increase productivity. (Ross, 2016, pp. 1-10) Such a manager has a high trust on the team and tends to give a lot of freedom and praises to the workers. Yet, this leadership style also has a tendency to lead on yielding any conflicts to protect the atmosphere, which then can result in insecure feelings. (Viitala, 2003, pp. 80)

Contrary to the above-mentioned Country Club leader is the “authoritarian” representing 9,1 on the table. Authoritarian leader instead of caring for the people and their needs, will place their main focus on the production and efficiency. Leader in this respect is often an expert on the field and considers only the hard results. (Viitala, 2003, pp 80) Subordinates working for such leader are merely seen as vehicles of production and often left only to executing the orders without individual creativity. (Montgomery, 2012, pp. 59)

“Impoverished” leaders with a position of 1,1 on the table similar to “Middle of the road” leaders of 5,5 have some level of support for the people and the tasks, but both fall short on each focus. (Management Study Guide, n.d.) Improvised leaders tend to avoid any

responsibilities, handing that out to the workers. Such a leadership style often leads to nominating an unofficial leader among the team. Middle of the road -leadership style is sometimes considered even as the most common style for the managers. The leader gives some freedom to the workers, but also carries out the final responsibilities. Also, conflicts are pursued to solve with compromises and in changing situations, old and safe customs are preferred over new and insecure. (Viitala, 2003, pp. 81) Managers performing poorly were focused more on performance or to make the employees happy, high performance demands balance between the dimensions. (Westbrook 2010, pp 31-48)

Finally, the “team leader” dimension with a placement of 9,9 on the table describes a leader who is able to combine the task- and the people- leadership on a desirably high level. The workers get the support and attention they need, while goals are still considered, i.e. both factors support and influence each other. The leader who succeeds in combining the tasks and people on a high level, feels that commitment, respect and trust are some of the major elements in creating an open team spirit, which will further reflect on employee satisfaction and efficiency. (Management study guide, n.d.) This level connects to the transformational leadership theories, as it highlights the importance of leader-follower relationship and is where the leaders should aim at their work, yet often the pressure of one or the other factor leads managers to seek support from the human resource team to provide help with the people-side. In addition, 9,9 is the level where IKEA Raisio would like to have its leaders, as will be discussed later on at the analysis - section.

Blake and Mouton’s theory was designed to be used with leaders’ self-assessment placing themselves on the grid. Nowadays, there are also various of questionnaires created to support the application of the theory which will examine the leaders’ decision making on specific situation and thus positions them on the grid. Yet, it has been criticized that the original Managerial Grid -theory does not consider the nature of the situation or the organization, and it will exclude other influential variables (Viitala, 2003, pp.81). In addition, the lack of empirical data and the disadvantages of self-assessment have considered to lower the reliability of the theory. (Leadership-Central, 2016)



### 3.2 Management Skills

Social Psychologist Robert Katz developed the Management skills -theory in 1974 by defining a relationship between the managerial competencies and the hierarchical management level. The theory contains three competence areas; Conceptual skills, Technical skills and Human skills. (Northouse, 2016, pp. 82) As it is based on skills rather than personality traits, Katz's theory clearly states that leadership skills are not inborn personality traits but can be learned and developed, similarly as what the Managerial Grid -theory bases on. (Peterson, 2004)

First out of three skills Katz defined in his theory was the conceptual skills, which refer to more abstract thinking in complex situations. As an example, a manager with great conceptual skills, is able to perceive the actual bigger picture of the organization, recognize how the different functions depend on one another and how changes in one function affects the rest. (Katz, 2009, pp. 18) Such skills also refer to the ability to express ideas and visions on verbal and written forms, but also to understand the economic principles underlying the organization's effectiveness. These skills are especially important and expected from the top management level, as can be seen from the figure 3 below. (Northouse, 2016, pp. 82-83)

The second competence area important for the managers is technical skills. Technical skills in this theory signifies the techniques and knowledge required to perform a specific job, specifically understanding of and proficiency in working with things which involve methods, processes, procedures or techniques. This could mean for example the work of an engineer or a surgeon, as those involve specialized knowledge and analytical abilities within the specialty. (Katz, 2009, pp. 7) Such technical skills are especially important for the lower level managers, since they typically lead employees who uses the same tools or work at the same field. When going higher at the hierarchical management scale, the importance of these skills decline. (Northouse, 2016, pp. 82)

The last of Katz's three managerial skills, are the human skills. A manager with such human skills possess the ability to work with other people, both individuals and groups. They also have the knowledge and skills to motivate the employees and thus creating a more effective working environment, motivation can for example be a result of the leader's sensitivity and empathetic skills. Such skills support the leader's ability to better adapt their own ideas to other's ideas, which again can help achieving organizational

goals more efficiently. (Northouse, 2016, pp. 82) A person with highly developed human skills is able to reflect his or her own assumptions, attitudes and beliefs about other people, it is also about the ability to utilize these reflections (Katz, 2009, pp. 9). The human skills, according to Katz, are the most important skills of the manager and stay essential at all hierarchical management levels of the organization as is illustrated in the figure 3 below (Northouse, 2016, pp. 82).

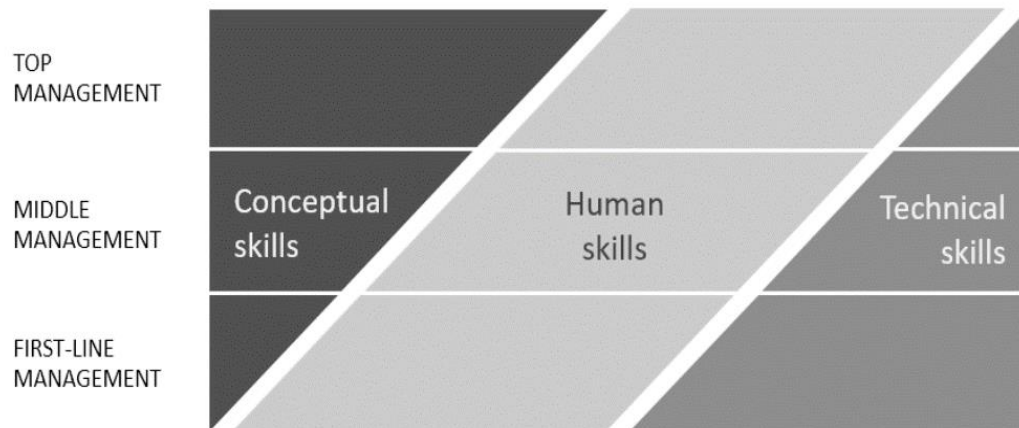


Figure 3 Management Skills by Robert Katz (Management Mania, 2016)

Katz's management skills -theory was already created several decades ago, but it can still offer a simple frame to portray efficient and successful leader, in the opinion of the author. The theory also leaves room for the reader to apply and interpret it. Yet, the reliability can always deteriorate due to the narrow scope of the theory, only considering three competence areas of the leaders.

## 4 RESEARCH

Research objectives for this thesis were to find out in what task areas do the leaders in IKEA Raisio store need support from the human resource department and if the managers consider the current level of support adequate. The purpose was to identify if there are areas of the cooperation regarding HR's support which should be developed further to better fit the leaders' needs.

### 4.1 Research design

The research design was made using the research union (figure 4.) as the frame for the complete study. The outer layer, *philosophies*, explains which research philosophies the author has adopted and how she approached the study. Positivism and realism are branches of epistemology and focuses on especially highlighting the significance of scientific approach to the development of knowledge. As a part of positivism, data is collected about an observable reality and causal links are searched to create generalizations. The foundation for these approaches is that the science is based on actual results which are independent from the researcher's status and feelings, making her value-neutral in the study. (Saunders, 2012, pp. 134)

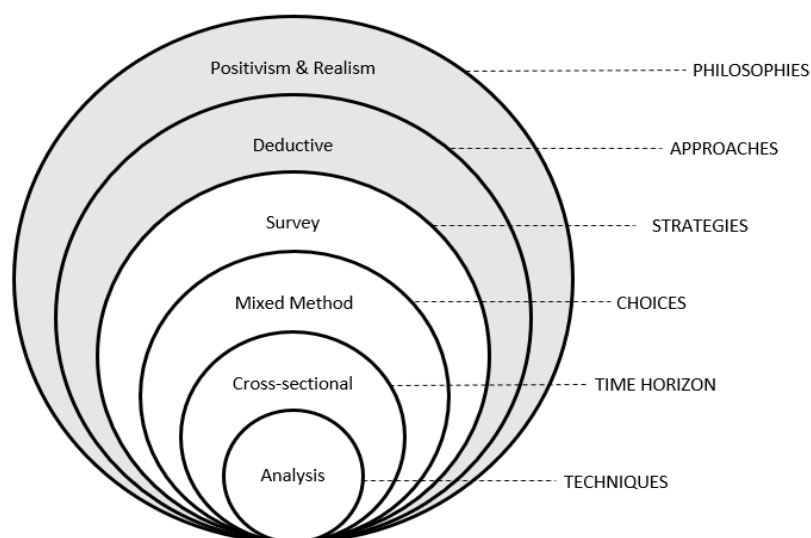


Figure 4 Research union (Saunders, 2008)

The second layer addresses the most appropriate *approach* for the study, which was chosen to be deductive style, the most commonly used scientific research approaches.

Deductive approach means that the research will be based on a theoretical framework researched by the author, and later on further tested with the research data collected by the author. (Saunders, et al., 2009, pp. 124)

When moving on to the inner layers of the research onion, the *strategy* for the research was to be defined. The type of the research was set to be exploratory, which indicates answering to a question such as “what is happening?” and acting as a flexible and adaptable way if new insight or data is gained during the research. Due to the type of the research, the strategy ended up being a survey. Surveys are often associated with a deductive approach and exploratory research, and it allows the collection of fairly large amounts of data and is suitable for collecting quantitative data and structured interviews. Surveys are also used to suggest any feasible links between different variables. (Saunders, et al., 2009, pp. 139-144)

Due to the nature of the study and above-mentioned strategies and research types, the actual research data used to achieve the set objectives was decided to be collected with mixed method research. Mixed method combines the qualitative method, which produces non-numerical data such as categorical data, and quantitative method, which again produces numerical data, such as graphs and statistics. (Saunders, et al., 2009, pp. 152).

In this research the mixed method will more specifically mean interviews and a questionnaire to collect the data. Quantitative research was focused on the leaders, a team of 36 people. The questionnaire was comprehensive and pursued to provide answers to the questions about the needed support and the consideration of the current situation by the leaders.

The questionnaire (appendix 4.) was created and later analyzed with the help of Webropol -tool and it included 16 questions, with different types such as nominal, ordinal and open questions, which were created by the author on the basis of the research questions set. The invitation to take part on the questionnaire was sent via work email for all leaders with immediate subordinates in IKEA Raisio, i.e. 36 people, and it included a cover letter. The cover letter (appendix 3.) briefly explained the purpose of the research and why they were chosen to be part of it, but also mentioned that answering would take about 5 minutes and the results would be handled confidentially. The participants were given 13 days to answer, and the researcher reminded them twice during that time.

In addition, qualitative interviews were conducted with the HR department, a team of one manager and two specialists. With these interviews the objective was to clarify the current situation from the HR perspective. The HR Manager has been part of the research from the beginning, in means of regular meetings with the author (appendix 1). After the questionnaire results from the leaders were collected, an interview with the complete HR department was organized (appendix 2). With these interviews the researcher was able to combine both perspectives, the HR's and leaders', and thus support proving comprehensive answers to the research questions.

What comes to the *time horizon* of the research, the appropriate practice for this study was cross-sectional. With cross-sectional we mean the study of a specific phenomenon at a specific time. (Saunders, et al., 2009, pp. 155) Such time horizon was selected to be suitable for the research methods used and also due to time constrains. However, the company researched is able to repeat the study after some time, to receive broader data of the situation and its development.

Finally, the core of the onion designates the *techniques* and procedures used to collect and analyze the data. With the quantitative research the researcher will receive mainly numerically measured data to be quantified, but also in addition, some non-numeric data which can be classified into categories (Saunders, et al., 2009, pp. 417-418). The data will be collected and combined together to be processed in to diagrams and tables to help presenting the results and to analyze them more efficiently. The analysis stage will also include linking the results with the theory addressed earlier and thus getting to conclusions.

## 4.2 Sampling

Sampling provides the researcher various methods which enables him or her to reduce the amount of data collected. The research will then consider only the sub-group, rather than all possible cases. Sampling methods are divided in to two groups, probability and non-probability sampling, which reflect the equality of being selected among the population. Sampling is often chosen due to budget or time constrains or considering including the complete population to the survey impractical. (Saunders, et al., 2009, pp. 210-213)

However, the author decided that there was no need for sampling in this case, as the research population was relatively small. This alternative is described with a term census (Saunders, et al., 2009, pp. 210). The researcher was able to include all the leaders in IKEA Raisio, who have immediate subordinates to the case, as the complete population was 36 people.

#### 4.3 Reliability and limitations

All the respondents answered the questionnaire independently, without the researcher being present and since affecting the situation in any ways. The respondents were able to access the questionnaire only once, so that duplicate answers would not be possible. In addition, the researcher provided fair amount of space to answer the open questions (50-200 words), to prevent a situation where a respondent would not be able to clarify their answer.

First limitation to the survey was the number of the respondents. As 25 leaders of 36 answered, the total response rate was 70 per cent of the research population. As the population is relatively small to begin with, missing respondents have a greater influence on the reliability of the representation. The response rate could be explained with situational factors; during the two weeks of answering time, there were campaigns and events in IKEA Raisio. This can have an effect on the leaders, as they are busy to begin with. Also, few of the leaders were on a holiday, sick leave and business trip during the survey time, which reflects to limited access to email.

The researcher pursued to phrase the questions in a non-leading way, so that the outcome would be as reliable as possible. This actualized well, except on regarding question 7 where the Likert scale included “mediocre” as a neutral option. This phrasing can be contradictory and interpreted more negatively than as neutral. This should be regarded when the question is construed.

Another limitation to the survey can be the language of it. The questionnaire was conducted in English, as there were also non-Finnish speaking leaders in IKEA Raisio. This resulted so that majority of the respondents were not doing the questionnaire in their native language. Although, the leaders are expected to have fluent English skills, it might still affect, for example, the ability to answer open questions comprehensively. Due to the feedback the researcher got during the answering time related to the language, it

was communicated to the leaders that they could also answer the open questions in Finnish. Yet, this was few days after the questionnaire was released.

In addition, the length of the questionnaire can influence the reliability of the answers. The questionnaire was designed so that it would provide comprehensive answers to the research questions, but it ended up being relatively long. The researcher estimated that it would take about five minutes for the respondents to answer all the 16 questions, yet after finishing the survey she noticed that majority of the respondents had spent considerable more time on the questionnaire. This was seen from the data recorded by the Webropol -survey tool. The fluency of the language and depth of the open questions might have had an effect on this, but also afterwards the researcher considered that the phrasing of the questions might have been too long. Too long survey can result in not focusing on the questions or even discontinuing the survey, yet in this respect no discontinued answers were given.

Also, regarding the HR's interview, as the participants were not given a chance to see the questions beforehand, it can have an effect on the extent of the answers. The advantage of allowing them to prepare for the interview could have given more in-depth answers, which might have not come into their minds with this setting. But the decision was made by the researcher to conduct the interview this way, as she wanted to create more of an open discussion. Also, time constraints had an effect on the arrangements.

Finally, it should be stated that the HR manager of IKEA Raisio, was part of the process from the beginning, with regular meetings with the researcher. Due to the possible bias effect, the HR manager was not included in the group of leaders who answered the questionnaire. Also, she did not affect the formulation of the questions, to avoid any bias effect. However, in means of regular meetings, she can be assessed to influence the researchers work.

## 5 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF THE CASE COMPANY

### 5.1 Quantitative research findings

*Concealed*

### 5.2 Qualitative research findings

*Concealed*

### 5.3 Analysis

*Concealed*



## 6 CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Development areas of HR and suggestions for actions

*Concealed*

### 6.2 Actions following the research

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## **INTERVIEW BASE 1.**

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## **INTERVIEW BASE 2.**

*Concealed*

## EMAIL INVITATION TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello,

I'm working on a research in IKEA Raisio, of which objective is to find out if the current ways HR department is supporting the leaders on personnel related topics are sufficient. The research will be part of my thesis and I would like to ask you to be part of it! 😊

With the survey, I'm examining e.g. different tools and sources leaders use when looking for any information when handling personnel related matters, also how those tools are used and perceived.

You have been selected to be part of this research since your position in IKEA Raisio includes immediate subordinates. To get a comprehensive view of the situation and reliable conclusions, I would kindly ask you to answer the questionnaire as soon as possible but latest by 6<sup>th</sup> of May. Any of the answers cannot be linked to individuals and the results will only be used as an overview of the situation.

Answering will take you about 5 minutes, please note that you will only be able to access the survey once. If any issues occur or you would like to receive additional information of the research, feel free to contact me through email and I'm happy to answer 😊 You also have an opportunity to comment or clarify your answers anonymously at the end of the survey.

The survey will be done in English and can be accessed through this link\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking time to answer the questionnaire and being part of the research!

Best Regards, Emma Ahola

## Questionnaire

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